

# Nagoya Writes!

Vol. 1 No. 2

2006



# Nagoya Writes!

---

## Table of Contents

### Message from the prose editor

*By John J. Sapelak*

### Message from the poetry editor

*By Brian Cullen*

### Featured Story

Umbrella Maneuver.....	2
<i>by Tom Beulle</i>	

### Featured Poetry

Heat – What is it?.....	4
<i>Reed Gage</i>	

### Stories

The Train Ride.....	6
<i>by Ernest Schaal</i>	

Windows On Japan.....	8
<i>A Memory in Four Parts by Sarah Mulvey</i>	

Midori Shijimi.....	12
<i>by Zach Lynott</i>	

Summertime's a Burning in Japan.....	16
<i>by Steve Howard</i>	

<b>The Writer.....</b>	<b>18</b>
<i>by Roy Hernandez</i>	
<b>Summer Cleaning.....</b>	<b>21</b>
<i>By copykat</i>	
<b>Poetry</b>	
<b>22°F .....</b>	<b>23</b>
<i>Yuka Urushibata</i>	
<b>The Hot Truth (Chinaski as I know him).....</b>	<b>25</b>
<i>a poetry review by Joe Sichi</i>	
<b>Summertime Blues.....</b>	<b>29</b>
<i>(To a Red Autumn Beat) by Sarah Mulvey</i>	
<b>待つ (歩き続けること) .....</b>	<b>31</b>
<i>みやむら おうむ</i>	
<b>To Wait (Endless Walk).....</b>	<b>32</b>
<i>Ohm Miyamura</i>	
<b>Haiku.....</b>	<b>34</b>
<i>Joe Kashi</i>	
<b>Sleep Eludes Me.....</b>	<b>35</b>
<i>Brian Cullen</i>	
<b>Our Heat... Rubbing The Paradise.....</b>	<b>39</b>
<i>Cristy ???</i>	
<b>Talkin' Settee.....</b>	<b>40</b>
<i>(to be sung while clapping hands)</i>	
<i>by Tom Bauerle</i>	

# Nagoya Writes!

Prose Editor: John J. Sapelak  
Poetry Editor: Brian Cullen  
Design and Layout: Ernest Schaal  
Art Credits: Fire graphic on cover - Albert Sussler  
Art on this page - Joe Sichi

The Nagoya Writes! Group hosts Open Readings, Writing Workshops and other events. For more information on those events and for submissions information, please check our websites:

Print Edition: <http://home.att.ne.jp/wave/NagoyaWrites/>

Online Edition: <http://web.mac.com/eschaal/iWeb/Site/NagoyaWrites/index.html>



# Message from the prose editor

*By John J. Sapelak*

This was my first attempt to edit work that has been written for purely creative purposes, and to usher them into a form that could be considered ‘final.’ The task is frightening, and probably feels a little bit like holding another person’s newborn child, but without permission. I’m thankful to the Nagoya Writes group for allowing me the chance to assist in editing this journal after attending only a few readings, having read a only sad handful of lousy poems.

Also, thank you for the writers for trusting me with their work.

Some more than others, the selections that have been ‘kidnapped’ for this issue have as much a connection to Japan as they do with the theme of ‘Heat.’ Japan’s attention-seeking summer months are a red-hot nuisance to assure a spot as the single most topic of every conversation. It is during these months that people are not merely living and being, but also coping with Japan’s inexorable heat.

I was asked to choose featured selection for prose, so without much hesitation, I chose ‘The Umbrella Maneuver,’ by Tom Bauerle. I feel that it stands out not only for its adherence to theme and skillful prose, but for its description of the noble and beautiful intentions of the Umbrella Man in an otherwise oppressively hot and sometimes ugly environment punctuated by extremes.

So, enjoy the atmospheres presented in these collected works, and may you find your own beauty in all of them.

# Message from the poetry editor

*By Brian Cullen*

What is heat? Perhaps in his poem in this issue, Reed Gage has given us the most succinct answer.

Heat is really just a symbol to communicate  
Some intense experience we wish to relate  
Whether it means hot or not – we can debate

With the summer finally behind us, indeed we can begin to debate the meaning of heat, or better still we can begin to enjoy it in the form of these poems.

# Featured Story

## Umbrella Maneuver

by Tom Beulle

The umbrella man guards us from the nameless dread. Each dawn he steps from beneath the elevated highway where he sleeps in a cardboard box that once housed a copy machine. He stands and stretches while his grim, unwashed face squints into the rising sun. With exact precision, he assembles his equipment. From the pockets of his quilt-lined corduroy pants, he withdraws three fist-sized balls of tin foil. He draws down the zipper of his wrinkle-cracked nylon jacket and then unrolls the foil in long strips, winding it like surgical tape around his upper torso. Soon he is crinkling and shining from stomach to chin. Next, he begins humming softly to himself as he reaches overhead and takes down a set of broken Yamaha stereo headphones that had been dangling from a rusted metal bolt in one of the highway bridge abutments. He tucks the plug end of the headphones beneath the foil under his right arm, wriggling it around to make sure it is making good contact.

When the headphones have been jammed down over his woolen cap, ear scoops securely over his ears, the Umbrella Man reaches inside his cardboard box home and takes out a long black metal object. He unlocks the catch and the head unfolds to reveal the stripped skeleton of an umbrella. The cloth covering has been removed, leaving only the thin metal fishbone beneath. Wrapped around the handle is a thick coil of electrical wire. The Umbrella Man tucks the loose end of the wire under the tin foil covering his stomach and lodges it securely in, just above his navel. Gripping the umbrella in both hands, he points its Medusa metal head directly at the eastern horizon and begins listening for the whispers of warning.

The Umbrella Man is usually the first familiar face I see as I stumble each morning from the Sakai Subway station to the office where I work. He's there today, surveying the dawn sky; head cocked to one side, best ear thrust forward inside his earphones, turning and adjusting the position of his umbrella for better reception. It is the middle of summer. The short walk from the station has raised the sweat on my forehead. My shirt was already dripping from the unwanted friction of the packed bodies of strangers on the rush hour subway car. Having been brought up in the spacious prairies of Midwest America, I still feel queasy every time I am forced to endure the touch of the bodies of so many strangers shoved up against mine. One very well dressed, tiny woman had repeatedly pressed herself close to my backside to try and escape the advances of a middle-aged salary man standing behind her. He had kept his face impassive, eyes focused elsewhere, as if nothing were going on, while he used the swaying movement of the crowd to maneuver his crotch up against her buttocks. Her attempts to dodge his pelvic thrusts had caused her to inadvertently dry hump my rear end until I wormed myself around against the press of humanity, lifted her up and put her on the far side of me where the pervert couldn't reach her.

When I looked the old molester in the eye, there was not one trace of guilt on his face, but a rather sly and knowing smile as if he and I shared some kind of dark secret together. He had misread the meaning of my movements, and immediately tried to stick his privates

between my butt cheeks. I grimaced and elbowed the little bastard solidly in the chest. He exhaled with the blow and backed away as far as he could. His face looked genuinely hurt and betrayed. I couldn't read the look on the lady's face. Was it gratitude? Shame? Disgust that she had been touched by two men, not just one?

The Umbrella Man stands in his cracked coat and corduroys, oblivious to the heat. His home-made radar dish is held aloft, his entire being open to the heavens as he sifts through the star static and cosmic hum for the signal he seeks. He listens, turns the umbrella a quarter turn, pauses, and listens again.

I sneak closer and ambush him from behind. "Getting anything today?" I ask, maybe a little too loud. He jumps, sucks in a startled breath, relaxes when he turns and sees my face.

"Nothing yet," he replies. "But it's coming soon."

Even though I've got my darkest shades covering my eyes, I still have to raise my hand to shield against the reflection of the sun on his foil-wrapped body. One of those weird time-stop distortion moments hits me as he disappears into a shining silver halo.

"What, exactly are you looking for?" I ask. We've played this game before, but it pleases me to hear him talk. His voice is deep but merry, like an accommodating bullfrog.

"It," he replies. "It's coming for all of us."

"What is it, exactly? I mean, is it something big or small?"

"Big enough to get us all. Small enough to be personal."

"Is it hard or soft?"

"Its coming will be gentle. Its arrival will be very hard, maybe impossible to resist."

"Is it hot or cold?"

"Hot as your darkest desire. The cold you don't want to know about."

"Well, let me know when it's time to head for the hills, will you?" I speak into the light. I am stunned, but he crinkles when he moves, so I hear rather than see him nod in affirmation. Then he turns his attention back to the far horizon and the sun's reflection is blocked by the back of his coat.

When my eyes have refocused, I walk on my way.

As I come abreast the copy machine cardboard box he lives in, I pause long enough to take a thin paper bill out of my pocket and stick it in the cutaway door he has sawed in the side. The Umbrella Man has strict rules. I am only allowed to give him money on the end of the month, because he knows it's my payday. He gets insulted if I leave more than a 1,000 yen note at a time. After dropping the bill in, I go on my way while we both pretend not to notice what I've just done. Today, however, something out of the usual happens. As I walk away, a sharp flash of light at my back lets me know he's turned to watch me. I hear him take in a breath as if he is about to say something to me. Even though I know I shouldn't look, my head turns involuntarily toward him. I catch him out of the corner of my eye as he quickly jerks his head away and returns to his task of sifting through the sonics of sunrise. I walk on, leaving him standing boldly on the curb stone, listening and serving as the first line of defense for whatever it is he fears is coming for us all.

# Featured Poetry

## Heat – What is it?

*Reed Gage*

Atoms, energies radiating  
Multitudes of molecules vibrating  
Elements energies translating

Is that what heat is?

Or simply heat as in hot  
Like boiling water in a pot  
Or pain to a body spot

Is that what heat is?

Or maybe heat as in a high temperature  
In a person – a high fever for sure  
Illness produces heat, or is that the cure?

What about heat as in animals mating?  
Cycles of receptivity for procreating  
Reproductive biology is so fascinating

And sports –

A preliminary race in the meet  
Sporting contestants compete in a heat  
To decide who is the best athlete

The heat of a soccer game  
Heat of the night, passions aflame  
Heat of the battle, all meaning the same

Criminals, lawbreakers on the street  
Complain of police action as heat  
Stressful fear of justice they might meet

On the contrary

Police and City officials complain  
Of media coverage an embarrassing pain  
The heat of the press – another name

In conclusion

Heat is really just a symbol to communicate  
Some intense experience we wish to relate  
Whether it means hot or not – we can debate

But one thing for sure  
Word usage is not pure  
And heat is not always measured in temperature

# Stories

## The Train Ride

by Ernest Schaal

Looking back, he remembers the heat of that day but not the blue sky. The blue was a solid blue, with not a touch of gray. It was the type of blue called aqua blue, or 0080FF on his HTML color chart. In other words, it was a light greenish-blue that is more often associated with Caribbean waters rather than with Japanese skies. He should have remembered such a sky.

He always remembers that day as being drab and overcast. Sometimes he even remembers it as raining, the type of rain that makes an early afternoon look pitch dark. Drab and overcast weather seems to better match his memory of that day.

When he boarded the train in Gifu, he easily found a window seat. He didn't particularly like window seats, but he always saved the aisle seat for her because she felt claustrophobic whenever she sat anywhere else. It became just an engrained habit within him that he found himself avoiding the aisle seat even when he was alone. He doubted if she would ever be with him again, but he still kept the aisle seat open for her.

The air conditioning was on full blast, which made the empty train car too cold. A lot of people catch summer colds because of the extreme differences between the hot outdoors and the air-conditioned indoors. As the train car filled with commuters, the car began to warm up.

A fashionably dressed woman in a light grey suit and high heels took the seat next to him. She reminded him of a young Audrey Hepburn, the one that appeared in "Sabrina" and "Roman Holiday" and still appears so often in Japanese advertising.

The woman didn't have the same facial features as Ms. Hepburn, but they had the same "look," the same sense of style. The woman looked young, thin, fresh, intelligent... all the qualities that he usually dreamed of in his ideal woman.

When she sat down beside him, she began to read a book. He noticed that it was "Farewell to Arms" by Hemmingway, his favorite author.

Before his most recent relationship, he probably would have commented on the book, trying to segue into a discussion of Hemmingway's role in literature, with the hope that he would soon have her cellular phone number. Now he was free again, but he didn't feel up to making the effort. The heat and recent events had drained him of the energy needed to face possible rejection.

Instead of striking up a conversation with a potential woman of his dreams, he did something that he normally didn't do. He looked out the window and watched the scenery go by. The train trip to downtown Nagoya only took about twenty-five minutes, and yet they passed plenty of rice fields.

Back home, where he came from, there would never have been fields of crops that close to the heart of a major city. There also would never have been houses interspersed within those fields.

Back home, rural areas were rural, and urban areas were urban, and the two of them would not be so intertwined.

Most of the rice fields were freshly planted with thin rice seedlings and the fields were filled with water, so that the houses looked like small islands, isolated from each other by a sea of calm, green water.

Looking at the view, he wondered if the people living in those houses were as isolated from each other, like the houses were isolated by the rice fields.

Within a few minutes, the view changed from fields to buildings, as they entered the city of Owari-Ichinomiya. This is the one train station that all trains stopped at between Gifu and Nagoya.

The woman who reminded him of Audrey Hepburn must have gotten off there. When he turned from the window, she was gone, as if all of a sudden. What made him turn from the window was a strong odor of tobacco, which came from the clothes of the person taking her place, a rough-looking Japanese guy reading a comic novel with sword fights and severed limbs.

He found the change in seating partners depressing.

He noticed that the temperature of the train car had gone from uncomfortably cold to uncomfortably hot and stuffy. He turned back to the window as the train began to move again, and soon they were again among rice fields and islands of housing.

Every once in a while, a train would pass on a parallel track and the air pressure caused by the passing train would force his train to rock violently. And for a moment his view was blocked by the blurry vision of the passing train that was soon gone.

In the distance, there was a baseball game on a large school field, or maybe it was softball. It was too far to tell. He thought it was a high school, but again, he couldn't tell. It could have been a middle school instead. It was so far away that he couldn't even tell if they were boy teams or girl teams.

The school field and the players were only visible to him for only ninety-eight seconds, before other buildings blocked the view. Still, he thought he remembered it clearly.

The windows of the train car were closed because of the air conditioner. The train was noisy, and some schoolgirls were chatting as they stood by the door, but he thought he remembered hearing the players' laugh. He remembered it as a mocking laugh, as if they knew he was alone and they were celebrating the fact that they were not.

When he got to Nagoya, he had forgotten about the woman seated next to him for part of the trip, but he would long remember those ball players, and the mocking laughter that he thought he heard on a hot, drab, rainy day.

# Windows On Japan

*A Memory in Four Parts by Sarah Mulvey*

## Part I – In the Air:

September, 1995. Air Canada flight 26, Vancouver to Nagoya. I'm sitting in economy, crammed bent-kneed into my too-small seat, when I get my first real taste of Japan, both literally and figuratively. This is a few years before Asian edibles, particularly the Japanese variety, have become commonplace in Canada's west coast. I'm staring out the little window to my left, my own rectangular slice of the world spread out in front of me in fluffy whites and streamlined blues. This is my adventure and it has just begun. When offered the choice of lasagna or Japanese noodles, I jump on the noodle option immediately. I want my culinary experimentations to begin right now. The flight attendant, wearing a uniform the same colour as the slick blue sky outside my window, passes me my tray. On it is a neatly arranged assortment, including soba noodles, a perfect cube of white tofu, and steamed sticky rice. The soya sauce is packaged in miniature plastic fish-shaped bottles. I rip my chopsticks apart quickly in anticipation. They break unevenly in two. The wood is jagged and splintered, one stick much thicker than the other. I quickly attempt to cover my faux pas, hoping my Japanese seatmate won't notice how awkward I am with my woody eating utensils.

But, he notices. He makes an enthusiastic eating gesture, smiling, and says to me; "You use chopsticks very well!" His grin is contagious and sincere.

I beam.

## Part II - Landing – Nagoya Airport:

When the plane lands, I follow the crowd of people in front of me. They seem to know where they're going. I look at the signs directing weary travelers to their proper waiting stations. My queue is labeled quite clearly. In bold red lettering, it reads "Aliens". I take my place in this line, passport gripped tightly in my free hand, while the other hand attempts to adjust the straps of the 30-kilo backpack weighing me down. Jet lag is making its presence known through a persistent buzz deep in my middle ear. The fluorescent lights lined up symmetrically above my head add to the din with their own frantic rhythm; Bizz! Pause. Bizz! Pause. Bizz! The lights flicker in time with the persistent drone. I dig into my pockets, hoping to find a Tylenol among the lint, coins and candy wrappers. No such luck. My boarding pass stub is there, though, its edges already curled and frayed. Seat 42A, Window. I put it back in my pocket. I'll keep this as a souvenir; maybe paste it in a photo album later. The buzz in my head continues.

After a not-too-long wait, I find myself first in the queue, being summoned forward to the large, windowed Immigration cubicle. Stony-faced, middle-aged Immigration Man, official officer's hat firmly planted on the top of his head, has his hand outstretched before him. I decide he is definitely a no-nonsense type. I lay my passport in the opening below the glass. His hand glides under and grabs it in one swift motion.

An image suddenly comes to mind. My going-away party. Two nights ago. Bags packed, I had put my important going-to-Japan documents, including this sacred passport, on the glass-topped coffee table. One of my friends, a west coast boy through and through, is smoking a joint. His baggie of stuff is spilling out onto the tabletop, mixing with beer

drippings and nacho chip crumbs. What if that granola-stompin', tree-huggin', hippie wannabe dropped some his weed into my passport?

The bizz-buzz cacophony gets louder, my legs wobble, and the window separating me from my future reflects a blurry image of myself, hair askew, dark eyes with semi-circles staring back at me. It feels as if the temperature has gone up at least a few degrees. The heat is on, and its effect is tangible; I can feel the beads of sweat collecting on my upper lip. To Immigration Man in front of me, I am certain my face reflects that of a hard-core heroin junkie, desperate for a fix. I'm screwed.

He glances at the computer. He glances at me. He glances at the computer again. And then he speaks;

“English Teacher?”

I nod. I let out a bit of an affirmative “uh huh” and bob my head up and down. Perky, I should look perky. I could be teaching this man’s child. I attempt to curl the corners of my mouth up, but not too much. These Immigration guys can detect insincerity a mile away. They can also sniff the scent of one lone pot seed buried deep at the bottom of an overstuffed backpack. Or, stuck in the creases of a brand new passport for that matter. He’s looking right at me. Did his nose just twitch?

I’m screwed.

He rifles through the empty pages of my passport one more time. He grabs the rubber stamp in his right hand, and down it comes on page two. Bam! He slides it underneath the glass towards me. I grab it and attempt my first Japanese word with a real live Japanese person;

“Areeegattooo!”

I’m not certain, but I think I see Immigration Man’s stern façade crack slightly from behind his glassed-in enclosure. I detect the beginnings of an almost smile itching to get out. I think it’s his eyes that give him away. There is a glimmer, perhaps even a twinkle, buried in there somewhere. I hike my backpack over my shoulder and make my way to the luggage carrousel. I no longer feel fatigued or worn out. I practically bounce over to the circular conveyer belt, scanning for my belongings as it spits out bag after bag. I can’t help it. I give myself a little pinch.

I am in Japan. I am, officially, an Alien. I have the stamp to prove it.

I beam.

### **Part III - Welcome to Japan:**

My new home is, in reality, a room. It’s 6-tatami and contains a bar fridge, a portable gas burner on the bedroom floor, and a foldaway futon mat and cover. There is no chair or table. But there is a little TV. I put a patterned shawl over the unwatched television set, and place a lacquered black and red vase filled with yellow daisies on top. It’s the little touches, I know, that make a space a home. A good friend taught me that, and I never forgot those words of wisdom. They sure come in handy in this small space.

Toilet, sink and bathtub are all contained in a plastic stall very similar to the Air Canada restroom on my flight over. And, a thoughtful addition, an opaque plexiglass window on the toilet’s sliding door allows a soft glow to permeate the little cubicle space. I can read my Let’s Go Japan! by its soft light. After all, it’s in this space where I have the only seat in the

house. Many trips, some to Kyoto and Fukuoka, others to Sendai or into the Gifu wilds, are planned from my throne in my multi-tasking cubicle. Do Japanese use these cubicles as a personal library and planning space as I do? My gut instinct tells me probably not, and I'm not fluent enough in the language to ask such a personal question. It will have to wait.

My neighbours have brought me a large box of tomatoes. They are gorgeous tomatoes, perfectly round and plump, each with a bright green sprout on top. I generally don't eat tomatoes, picky eater that I am; however these particular specimens are practically begging to be devoured. I eat those tomatoes with every meal for a week. I dice them in a bowl with a dash of salt, a touch of pepper, and a drizzle of vinegar. I eat them with unevenly separated, splintered wooden chopsticks, sitting on my throne, lid and seat down, reading Soseki's *I Am a Cat*.

I beam.

## **Part IV – Fitting In**

Backpack firmly fastened to my shoulders, this book-carrying tool that is used by everyone back home is now a symbol, in my mind anyway, that declares I really am different, an alien. I don't fit in with the women here. One of my daily pass-the-time-on-the-train games is to count how many Japanese women I see carrying a backpack. From amongst the Prada, Chanel and Louis Vuiton totes, the highest number I ever spy is two. As it turns out, one of those two backpack toting Japanese turns out to be a Canadian.

I still remember her name, even though we only had a two-minute conversation on a train between stops. She had noticed my little maple leaf pin and came and sat beside me. She was Louise from Kapiskasing, a fresh-faced and happy JET. She had arrived a week before, she let me know in her breathy, early-twenties enthusiasm. We only had time to chat for two stops, and then she was gone. I watched her through the window of the train as she bounced down the stairs to the adventures she would certainly find. Her backpack announced her foreignness without hesitation or apology. Its very difference from the norm made her special, someone to whom exciting things would happen. It didn't weigh her down. I felt like such a Japan old-timer gaijin; jaded and cynical. I had been in Nagoya for four months. I wanted to slam my backpack on the floor of the train and stomp on it.

Before the train doors close, a little girl, perhaps four years old, jumps on with her mother, narrowly missing the whoosh of the sliding doors. Mother and daughter are laughing, a little out of breath, as they search for a seat. The daughter climbs up on a vacant spot. The little girl kneels on the seat, nose pressed against the train window, as her mother carefully removes her daughter's miniature Pokemon sneakers. She is very careful not to let the little shoes touch the seat, and places them neatly on the floor below. The girl is now ready for the scenes that will soon be flying by in front of her through her own personal square of window. She has the best seat in the house.

Kneeling and gazing out the window, her back is towards me, I see she is wearing an oversized Sailor Moon backpack. Sailor Moon is staring at me with one twinkling, exaggerated manga eye. The other eye is closed in a conspiratorial wink. Her cartoon smile, although subtle, is most certainly directed at me. Sailor Moon is communicating with me on an afternoon commuter train. I look around to see if anyone else is giving this extraordinary

event any notice. Everyone is doing their own thing; reading, dozing, applying make-up. My stop is next.

I hike my backpack securely on my shoulders and watch the neon Pachinko and Karaoke signs going by outside the window in front of me. The train comes to a stop, and the doors slide open to let me out. I give a final glance over my shoulder at the little girl who now has both hands planted against the window. She's willing the train to move again, slapping her palms on the glass and giggling. I step out of the train and onto the platform. I am now on the other side of her looking-glass world, and we stare at each other as the doors slide shut. I wave. She's still laughing as the train begins to move. She waves back at me, and slaps the window one more time. She keeps waving as the train picks up speed. And then, she's gone. I know she can't hear me, but I say it anyway.

“Arigatou.”

I run down the steps and into the station, my backpack bouncing against me, offering a gentle reminder of its weight. I walk into the station.

I beam.

# Midori Shijimi

by Zach Lynott

The man comes to a large grass covered dune. Its surface is striated in Martian hues, growing from a light base to a dark, foreboding peak. A dead road rims it, pitted and forlorn. The man climbs, feet parting the cinnamon sand. When he crests he finds the sea, but he'd heard it long before, the steady crash of waves. The sky bands between the pale clouds and dark horizon. Wind beats the breakers in quick froth.

When he reaches the shore he feels the dune rear up behind him. Suddenly it's more cragged, its features streaming off to reveal rents of granite and limestone. How did he scaled it so easily? Before there'd been the soft sand and nothing more.

The booming surf brings him back to the sea. He colludes with its flow by watching the motion of light on water; his pulse slows in time to the breaking waves; his lungs breathe in the brisk breeze whenever it gusts. The air goes hazy, infused by a yellow glow. Sensing the approach of something unknown he looks back along the beach.

Another comes through the haze. His stride's set in a formal gait; function guides him although no uniform states his purpose. His attire is business to the first man's casual, a creased suit that crisply snaps with the wind. He steps up and coughs, a deep bronchial wrench of sound that clears the air between them. The first man sees only the general outline of the other. Degrees of deepening shadow define his features; the setting sun haloed his indistinct expression. They stare at each other for a few moments, letting the scene around them draw its breath. Finally the business-attired man says:

“This was found amongst the effects of my charge; its incongruousness proved vexing to our investigation. I'm relieved to be returning it to you.”

A shape emerges from the interior of the man's coat. He hands it over to the first man, who accepts . . . a wallet. Its surface is smoothed from pocket marred years to a rich, burnished brown.

“I'm sorry if it caused you any trouble. May I ask how you came by it?”

“It was found amongst the effects of my charge. Quite personal in contrast to his appearance. I felt this was right thing to do.”

“It's good you found me. How did you know it was mine?”

“Your name's in it. We found this perplexing. The charge was wearing running shorts at the time, was in fact in the midst of a marathon when he collapsed. By the time he came to us he was deceased.”

“Extraordinary.”

“You know this story?”

“Not quite. I'm still recovering from a marathon last week. I couldn't complete it because I had an asthma attack, the worst in years.”

“The charge was carrying it on him; quite strange when you consider the sport. More embarrassing still was when the resident I.D. failed to correlate with the name behind the entry number.”

“Amazing. A pick pocket in a marathon.”

“Perhaps. Did you report your wallet missing?”

“I didn't even notice its absence.”

“Didn’t notice its absence?”

“I’ve been recovering these last few days. Food was already stored, and I don’t go out much. Funny what you can get by without.”

“You live close to here?”

“I’ve never been here before. I often go out.”

“You just said you never do.”

“To other people, that’s what I meant. I’m a regular in the world. That’s why I started running: there was too much to see, walking didn’t cover it.”

“Buy a car.”

“Past incidents preclude such an option.”

“We wondered about the I.D.”

“It’s unnecessary to dwell on it. I’ve reformed: running was a big part of that.”

“Have you participated in other marathons?”

“Only a few. I prefer to go out alone.”

“But sometimes you run?”

“In marathons? Yes, sometimes.”

“Might you recognize the man if shown a picture?”

“I don’t think so.”

“You’re sure?”

“Certainly there’s the chance, but I’ve only recently come here. Given the size of the race, the number of entries . . . do you have a picture on you?”

“No, it was just a thought. Forgive me. Still, it was quite large, and I’m curious. Perhaps you were placed near him. What was your number?”

“Hmmm, let’s see. I believe I was #26.”

“You’re sure?”

“Yes, yes now that I think I’m sure I was #26.”

“This is most distressing.”

“How so?”

“That’s the same number as the one affixed to my charge.”

“That can’t be right.”

“No, but it is. Are you absolutely certain . . .”

“Yes, I was #26.”

“Perhaps there was a mix-up at entry. Only one name’s recorded under the #.”

“Well, seeing as I have my wallet it can hardly be me.”

“Quite so.”

“Unless my life’s flashing before my eyes.”

“I don’t follow.”

“Sorry, just an attempt at humor—a sorry attempt at that.”

“Very sorry. Let’s not get absurd. For you this may be amusing, but I take it very seriously. It’s important for all concerned that things be in order!”

“Please, there’s no need to get angry.”

“You have no idea how trying this ordeal’s been for me! Even such a simple duty as returning an item becomes difficult. I’m in no way some figment sir! I’m on a specific task that must be completed, and I won’t court with absurdity. Too many roll with it, hell bent on

becoming objects of derision. Not me my friend. I find a little elbow grease always smoothes some sanity into the proceedings.”

“I wholeheartedly agree. Perhaps I’d dropped my wallet while changing. Upon finding it the man kept it with the intent of turning it over to the authorities.”

“Through the whole race?”

“Perhaps I dropped it near the starting line. I was changing near there.”

“Hmmm, I see.”

“Anyway, I’m sure this will all work out. Am I needed for anything else?”

“Hm? Oh, no no. The effects are in order; I just thought I’d spare the family any further unseemliness.”

“Unseemly?”

“They were shocked by certain aspects of the charge’s life that came to light after his passing.”

“Really.”

“I can’t say more: I share a confidence, if not a life, with the charge. The family is very fragile now. The disclosure of his tattoos, though their nature be more or less benign, greatly distressed them. It was the secrecy you see, that he could hide them from others; the complete surprise of their revelation coupled with other, more disturbing facts upset them greatly.”

“Tattoos?”

“What’s the time? My, I’ve already taken too long! I must head back now.”

“What tattoos?”

“Two of them, one on each shoulder blade. Fitting considering their nature, that of butterflies.”

“Butterflies?”

“I’m sorry, but I really must get back. I’m so relieved to be through with this. They were quite extraordinary though: twin butterflies, one with its wings open, the other wings closed. They sat on opposite branches of a cherry tree, its buds only beginning to blossom. Its trunk ran up his spine and forked into two branches, at the tips of which sat the butterflies, adjacent to each other. The butterfly with closed wings sported an exterior resembling a snake’s skin. Quite vivid this, the quality of ink, the minuteness of craftsmanship, was of the highest caliber. The skin held five golden eyes which were quite startling to look upon. It was as though you were caught as prey in their gaze. When open the wings revealed their dual nature, a vibrant green that glowed beneath the light, a jewel-like cast reminiscent of a sea urchin. It was quite the sight; it reminded me of my time in the Orient, the quality of things there. Have you been?”

“What?”

“Have you been to Asia?”

“Only briefly, a few days in Tokyo, a layover between Australia and here.”

“It’s quite extraordinary, the beauty of certain things. By now it’s gone, cremated this morning. Pity skin’s such a fleeting parchment, but perhaps that’s the draw: so permanent in our time, and so lost afterwards. My, you’re positively blanching! I must reign in my ruminations!”

“I’m OK.”

“Have you been walking long?”

“A few hours perhaps.”

“Well you’re turning rather pale my friend.”

“It’s nothing. I’ve been a little weak since the attack.”

“My chattering certainly hasn’t helped.”

“No no, it’s been fine.”

“I’ll be off then. Everything’s settled now. Please enjoy the rest of your day!”

The first man waves to the second as he makes his way up the shore. When the horizon consumes him the first lowers his hand, but rather than resting at his side it continues. Fingers touch cotton, pushing through the sun warmed fabric to trace the design lying beneath. The tide begins to rise, sinking his feet into the sand. Removing his hand he takes out the wallet, feeling its heft in his hand. In the waning sunset he pauses, fingers caught in the instant before opening, eyes intent as the sea rushes in, its waves almost as fast as his beating heart . . .

# Summertime's a Burning in Japan

by Steve Howard

It's a wonder Basho never duplicated Dante's Inferno, but then again maybe Basho wasn't as pissed off. Suffering is a prickly point of Japanese pride, a national identity almost. It's as if they read the first of the Four Noble Truths and decided that it would be the primary guideline concerning all things Japanese. Though much of Japan has been spearing well into the 30's this month the junior high school I work at steadfastly refuses to turn on the damn air-conditioning. Instead, they bite their tongues and bear the melting humidity.

I sit at my desk everyday staring at the icy beige colored air-conditioning unit. It calls to me. It tells how lonely and useless it feels. I'm empathetic. The usefulness of an ALT is an often-debated topic here. The need for a native English mouthpiece in the classroom is often just as incompressible to many of the Japanese teachers as the need to turn on the air-conditioning before it has been "officially" announced that summer has arrived.

This is where I think some cold hard Western logic would greatly benefit Japan. If for example the temperature outside reaches 27 C or higher even if the calendar says it is January 1st, then turn on the freaking air-conditioning!

I know, I know, "What about the environment?" "What about the Kyoto Protocol?" and most importantly, "What about Cool Biz?" Well, I'm all for protecting the environment. (Actually, I'm basically just a ponytail, pair of Birkenstocks, and a bag of patchouli short of being a full-blown tree hugger.) The problem is, at least with the Cool Biz part of it, is that Cool Biz caused more pollution than it prevented. That's right, caused more pollution! It turns out that Koizumi and the LDP gang's plan to protect the environment backfired. It has been estimated, by some environmentalists that, pollution levels actually increased when the Cool Biz campaign was kicked off. Garment manufacturers rushing to fill all the Cool Biz summer suit orders ended up generating more pollution than the air-conditioners would have. Japan ended up with more pollution and a bunch of ugly suits. Throw Koizumi's bad hair into the mix and you've got yourself one very hot and ugly bad hair/suit combo situation.

"So what's the solution?" you scream. How do we save Japan from environmentally evil air-conditionings and fashionably evil Cool Biz suit? The answer (drum roll) SPEEDOS! Yes, SPEEDOS! Japanese companies can let, or more probably force, all Japanese salary men to wear Speedos to the office during the summer months. Most of them already wear beach sandals around the office anyway, so we'll simply complete their ensemble. Throw open the windows, plug in a fan or two, and let the bare-skinned salary saps cool off the way nature intended.

"But what about the polluting garment industry firing up their factories to fill the new demand for Speedos?" I can hear you asking. Well, it won't be a problem and here's why. Aside from a few professional swimmers and some brave or clueless overweight male European beachgoers, there is almost no chance that the piles of unsold Speedos are going to be departing from their dusty shelves anytime soon. Even if every salary man in Japan bought a pair the sporting goods stores would still be pretty hard pressed to deplete their stocks.

In addition to solving the air-conditioning and bad suit problems facing Japan, Speedos would eliminate the need for plastic umbrellas during rainy season which would reduce the amount of non-biodegradable plastic going to the land fills. Consider; Speedos are swimwear

designed to be comfortable when wet or dry. Plus, they can easily be wrung out. Now, in addition to enjoying pleasant conversation in the toilet while pooping and peeing, Japanese businessmen can stand bare ass to bare ass happily chatting away while they wring out their Speedos. I'm betting company morale percentages will go through the roof.

So, Japanese salary men everywhere; turn off the air-cons, stow the umbrellas, and burn your Cool Biz suits, (uh, well I guess burning them would be bad for the environment too), recycle, yes, recycle your Cool Biz suits, and join the ball hugging Speedo revolution

## The Writer

by Roy Hernandez

Jose and Troy shared small space in a Nagoya City rent-a-business space. It was a 2x4-type cramped quarters that was always sweltering like a hellish inferno of heat. Jose was the proprietor of his own publishing house and boasted how great the business was going to get once the Japanese got drilled to the idea that persistent conformity was the key to success in any business, and he was gun-ho about his stance that what a writer needed was to focus on one ideal theme to write a story. This was Jose's philosophy, and down deep to the mortal death, he was assured in his belief. On the other side of the coin was Troy, who was a free thinker and a real writer. But under the command and watchful eyes of Jose, Troy could not write what he was really inspired to write. Instead he wrote on the themes Jose, in his fantasy conformity mind, mused was the right theme for the monthly magazine called Nago Inc. LTD.

There at his desk with his typewriter, Troy waited patiently for his Fascist Nazi boss to give him the theme for the month. Troy had really had enough of Jose and was really about to burst into a heat of hell fire and brimstone. He had had enough of his employers fanatical behavior as to what a writer should and should not write. The showdown was about to fuse into an atomic explosion as to who was right and who was really twisted in the brain.

“Troy ! I got it all figured out for the theme of this month’s magazine. Now, I have been thinking and scouting around and it has come to my observation that there is too much litter in the side walks, the streets, in alleyways... Everywhere there is garbage, so...”

“So who gives a shit or a rat’s ass about garbage? It is not our responsibility to write about this crap. We got to write about more serious things like the Middle East..earthquakes..tsunamis or about global terrorism. Writing about garbage is for the Local Media to deal with. You know they go around where all this garbage is thrown and ya know they make a small documentary. Jose ya got to get your mind out of the clouds. Like dude ya been drilled into this fascist conformity since well, since maybe your infancy,” yelled Troy.

“What are you talking about?” Jose yelled back at Troy.

“Well, it would seem that this strange obsession of themes began in your infancy. OK say your mama said, ’Jose, this week you will wear Pampers but next week mama will buy you Flowers and the next week mama will buy you Natural Nature disposable Eco-friendly diapers?’”

“Well what the hell do you think I am, a demented wacko or what? I am very successful in a variety of things, as you might have noticed...”

“I have noticed that you have a fondness for a certain type of tree and ya really paint them in so many colours and shades... I could not have ever believed trees could look like a rainbow.”

“I happen to like those trees. No, they are a form of trees especially suited for the Asian climate. No where in the world except for the Amazon rainforest can they exist, certainly, they could not exist in New York City..so I love them..I paint them..I see them in my dreams...”

“OH! God Jose! You are really demented; a tortured soul living in hell. I guess you’d better go to Mass and cry to that priest you always confess your sins to..I read that it is good

to cry when all the stress builds up..your eyes release these stress hormones which is good for your heart it said. Yeah, it's the truth," replied Troy.

"OK! So I have a few weak spots in my character ya know. Defects of character, but I am right about my trees, I love them dearly..so dearly..."

"I hope your trees go up in a blaze of fire till you can feel the heat crawl through your skin. The I pray that a giant bulldozer razes them clean out of sight from the roots..ahh then I can see the swimming pool where the girls are having fun in their bikinis. Got it?"

"You are such a hopeless case. You do not care about trees or nature or even the filth of the garbage everywhere you walk. What do you want to write about? Your fantasy of Milton or Poe, no Emerson, or lets make it Robert Louis Stevenson...rejection is what your afraid of. Am I right or not?" yelled Jose.

"OH! Jose, do you call rejection from that Secret Service dude that did our editing the last while back good editorship? I call it covering his ass and censorship from revealing that how much I loved the Princess. He denied me my freedom of speech and to write what I wanted to write. After all I am a writer, and I hardly think much has progressed in your writing because your mind is in a cube," replied Troy.

"Look Troy, you have blasted me on this issue that you do not agree with my theme about garbage in the next issue of the magazine, right?"

"Take it for what things are in real time, Jose. I wrote another story for the advancement of human tech, and it has been almost over a year, and where is the reality of that story in magazine form, huh? You are really full of deceptions and demons. Did your mother try to set you on fire when you were a child? I mean, you are a nice fellow but man dude you have a whole load of crap inside your head," replied Troy.

"Look, I got a head full of worries and I just do not have to put up with your satire, Troy."

"What worries do you have, Jose? Every time I see you, you got a beer can in your hands."

"I got to go to early morning Mass."

"Yeah right! To cleans the poisons out of your soul," Troy laughed out loud.

"Listen Troy, you write what you want to write. I admit; I give up."

"Listen dude, you can not be a bartender at night and hung over as a teacher in the day. Then there is the publishing of my work. You flunk the Test of Life, dude," Troy smiled.

"If you think a writer should write what inspires him, then do it, Shakespeare. I do not give a crap you write. Just write something OK?" Jose said, exhausted.

"I may write about Jungle Crows," Troy replied.

"Jungle Crows?" Jose looked startled and stunned.

"Yeah they like garbage and they have this cubical train of mentality. They cannot change from being conformist assholes. They all need to be shot dead because they are a menace to humans and society in general. Right?"

"Yeah, and the theme is about garbage, but in a wider spectrum," Jose said softly.

"The story will be finished by tonight."

"OK! Then write...write..write..." Jose replied, confident that he had won the battle on garbage.

Jose opened the door of the small 2x4 office that was as hot as the heat of hell, and he went off to morning Mass and, as he shut the door behind him, he could hear Troy the writer typing away on his typewriter.

## Summer Cleaning

*By copykat*

I woke up looking at the wall and rolled over towards the light, a slim beam was coming through the curtain. It touched just the bottom of the bed, highlighting the stripes on my blue and white covers. I laid there, my legs pulled up into my chest, looking at it for a while and thinking to myself: “look at all the dust floating around in there”. Perhaps it was time to clean the house a little. I stretched my back, arms up towards the headboard. Toes pointed straight out to the stopped clock on the table at the foot of the bed, “I’ve been meaning to put a new battery in that”. The top of my foot slightly passing through the spot of light on the covers, I felt the warmth, felt the tingle shoot up my leg. A little energy bubble to get up and moving on this lazy Saturday morning, which I knew I would spend recovering from a dull hangover. “I should have made that last train. July already. Damn it’s stuffy and hot in here.”

Sitting up, pulling my legs under me, and looking at the beam again, I let my eyes follow it up through the small opening in the curtain. I could see the green of the leaves in the full length window, down at the bottom floorboard, just under where the curtain doesn’t reach the floor. “I should have had special curtains made to fit these odd sized windows.” I sat up against the wall – neck crooked from the messy ponytail I still sported from last night, staring at the corner windows with the pale mauve curtains. I watched the green flit back and forth through the opening as I stretched my toes back out to the warm spot on the bed. Centering the beam right on the little scar over my middle toe and remembered when Joey stepped on my foot by accident, right at the bottom of the stairs when we were on our way to summer camp, “wonder what my brother is up to, I should give him a call.”

Getting up, I opened the curtains and could see the weeds growing out of control, I thought “I really need to tame those down.” The yellow flowers looked so calm in the sunlight coming down between the back of the house and the hedges. “I was going to buy a little fence to pull those in.” The long thin dead tree stump just outside the window stood as high as my chin, with some of the vines still wrapped around it, white all along the age lines of the bark. Dried out from the sun, it was dead when I moved in. Those vines were put there just about 3 months ago now. They were pretty overgrown and ragged, having lost that “Let’s throw these here for now to make it look alive” look and taking on more of a forgotten and neglected image in the harsh bright light that was shining through them onto the wood flooring, warming my toes.

When I pulled back the white sheer curtains, and I could clearly see the big spider’s web stretching high up over the whole small yard, with a butterfly teasing around under it’s trap, I remembered the sweat pouring down the middle of my back, the bee flying overhead, the sound of weeds being pulled and a plastic bag being shaken out for the roughage three months earlier. I felt the first heat of spring on my face that early April Saturday afternoon. I felt the sun creeping through my black t-shirt to my skin. The white gloves stained with the brown dirt were itchy on my hands. “I wore these on my birthday. That was a good climb. Artie handled it much better than I thought he would, another one I should call and find out what trouble he’s gotten into,” I thought. But this first day of spring in my little yard was much warmer. I wasn’t at the top of a mountain in August actually freezing, lips blue with the

cold. I was wearing these convenience store gloves in my own garden now. The spring breeze lightly brushed the small of my back exposed just under the t-shirt, just above the top of my jeans. As I bent over to clip the grass growing up through the bricks I could just get a glimpse of his hand reaching down between the yellow flowers' vines and around the dead tree stump. I felt the sun graze my face as I stretched to look into the vines to see what he'd found.

"There's a little purple tulip in here, somebody must have planted it years ago. I almost pulled it" he said leaning down. It was hard to see him, the glare of the light got in my eyes. "I should have put my sunglasses on," I absently thought. He came around the yellow flowers and pulled back the vines, pointing between the stems, I traced his arm with my eyes, down to his wrist where the veins on his arm stood out from pulling at the stubborn vines. Down his fingers, his knuckles red with scratches from the thorns, "I should have given him the gloves sooner. He's taken them off now though". He pulled me in to his side with the other arm, the sweat on his forearm actually felt cool against mine. The heat from the sun and the sweat from the work had absorbed into his shirt, it was damp against my arm. He leaned into me and said, "There, can you see it? Look towards the ground, you'd never know it was there. It's been hiding. Separated and protected in its own little pocket inside the vines." These words echoed down some tunnel in my head as I concentrated on the warmth of his arm around me, and the muscle tension in his chest pressed against my back. I felt the blood rise to my cheeks and the pulse quicken in my breast. "I see it," I said. But I was distracted by his closeness and the smell of his aftershave; I lost sight of the flower focusing only on the physical touch between us. I turned out of his embrace, caught my breath and lightly kissed his shoulder from behind, and a flash of this same shoulder on a bitterly cold January night came to me – muscles pulled tight, tense, cords defined along the neck pulling me up off the bed into his chest, only sweat between us and finally his entire length pressed against me, a hand in my hair, hot breath in my ear. My hand had reached up and circled his neck, and I pulled myself up closer, resting my lips on his shoulder – suspended in the pocket of his arms.

Drawing back the curtains to the patio, the gloves still sat on the dirty old plate from that spring afternoon. The grass now grew high between the bricks, "I haven't cut them since". The breeze was gone and July's humid air hung heavy on the old vines now brown, displaced on the old dead stump. The butterfly flirted around the spider, and landed briefly to catch her breath before moving towards another web, she danced with the sunlight on her wings. I opened the screen and walked out to the end of the patio, tiptoeing on the edge near the corner window that I had peered out from a few minutes ago from my bedroom. I pulled back the vines and looked toward the ground but it wasn't there. The petals were gone, the stem dried up in the summer heat. Thinking, "Still died from the heat even in its little pocket, wish I'd got a shot of it before it wilted. It's been ages since it died." I went back in, hit the air con switch, grabbed the phone, and started a strong pot of Arabian coffee to see me through the morning I was going to spend catching up and pulling dead weeds.

# Poetry

## 22°F

*Yuka Urushibata*

On Thanksgiving Holiday  
in New York—  
Looking out  
from my small window  
on the eleventh floor  
I could only see a man's feet walking  
below the curtain  
It's no surprise that  
people have shut their windows  
on 14th Street—  
on a cold day like this

On other days,  
through the opened windows,  
I have seen a man  
watching TV at night,  
a woman coming out  
of a room,  
another woman shutting  
her window,  
and another man looking  
out towards me  
But all that took place  
on a warmer day than this

Today I watched—  
the red-and-green-lit Empire State,  
and there, underneath it,  
so many windows were still lit  
in the Midtown,  
some people (I wondered why)  
were working  
on a day like this.

I listened to  
talk of Walt Whitman on the radio  
his shame to live became his poetry—  
And then the news on NPR  
President Bush thanking the troops  
For service in Iraq  
on Thanksgiving  
—people dead and wounded—

on a day like this

And as I listened on through the day  
being told I was such a fan  
for listening  
on a day like this

The weather forecast says  
the temperature will be  
22 degrees fahrenheit tonight.  
and I recognized—  
the space beyond privacy  
a street-width away,  
Into that space,  
my eyes wander  
the privacy gave itself up  
as I strived to transcribe  
the City's hovering serenity  
On a night like this

# The Hot Truth (Chinaski as I know him)

*a poetry review by Joe Sichi*

I have an admission,  
which is not to say  
a confession,  
because I don't actually feel guilty.

Luckily for you,  
today  
I have only an admission.

Often when I say  
“I’ve got a meeting,”  
or “Nanka yoji ga aru,”  
or some such nonsense,  
I actually don’t.

I’m just going home  
to have a quiet read,  
or a vocal read  
-- which I do sometimes --  
which is another admission,  
unless you happen to live  
next door to me  
and then it’s an apology,  
still not a confession,  
so you’re still lucky.

One of my favorite authors  
to read;  
silently,  
or vocally,  
or quietly,  
or while drinking coffee,  
or while making love  
-- yes, you can do that --  
or at all  
is Charles Bukowski,  
his real name,  
although perhaps not  
his best  
or perfect,  
or hot-lucky name.

In literary circles  
he’s known as

Buk,  
or Chinaski,  
or just  
Hank.

Which I find best.

If you haven't ever read him,  
you're about to be lucky again,  
as he sometimes was  
and sometimes wasn't  
at the race track.  
Though mainly that isn't why  
he went there.

He wasn't looking for luck  
although he found it  
there and elsewhere.

The first time I read  
this bit of hot truth,  
it made me laugh;  
as I'm sure it did him,  
though he isn't laughing now,  
at least not as we laugh.  
He died in 1994.  
(I'm sure you've heard.)  
I heard while teaching  
Middle School in East Hollywood.  
The LA Times blared  
on the front page  
the morning after  
he stopped laughing.

How he laughs now  
I don't know,  
but here's what he had to say  
one day not so long ago  
when he was still Hank,  
and not a corpse,  
and not a decomposed corpse,  
as he surely is now,  
perhaps laughing.

You're lucky  
as it's a short poem,  
unlike this one.

“8 count” by Hank

*“from my bed  
I watch  
3 birds  
on a telephone  
wire.*

*one flies  
off.  
then  
another.*

*one is left,  
then  
it too  
is gone.*

*my typewriter is  
tombstone  
still.*

*and I am  
reduced to bird  
watching.*

*just thought I d  
let you  
know,  
fucker.” (\*1)*

I don't curse a lot,  
you may have noticed.  
When I do  
it's either for a reason  
or a joke,  
or because I'm imitating  
someone,  
but I don't mind cursing  
especially from those  
who do it well.  
Hank did, and often,  
but I first became enamored  
of Bukowski's poems  
due to their hot honesty.

He writes beautiful  
and optimistically hopeful  
poetry as well,  
though he sandwiches  
those features  
among the shits  
and the fucks  
and the goddamn bastards,  
but always there rings  
an honesty

which is a hard thing  
to do  
in life,  
in strife,  
in the bath  
and even in bed,  
not to mention  
in poetry

in case you  
never tried it,  
fucker.

\*1 “8 count” by Charles Bukowski  
The Last Night of the Earth Poems, Copyright 1992 Charles Bukowski, First  
Published by Black Sparrow Press, Current Publisher Harper Collins Publishers Inc.

# Summertime Blues

*(To a Red Autumn Beat) by Sarah Mulvey*

## Writer's Notes

This poem was written on a high-humidity, low-tolerance, 37-degree Nagoya summer's day. I was just beginning my ten-minute trudge to work (which at that time meant jumping around with 6-year olds) and the sweat was pouring down. As always, the days when you don't want to be seen are the days when you bump into everyone you know. My friend Maria took one look at me and said; "Oh dear. You look just like a drooping flower." So, a poem was born. (I have since bought an air-conditioner. Oh, and I no longer jump around with 6-year olds. Summer this year wasn't quite so bad!)

-i-

Drooping flower  
head bent in defeat  
overbearing, oppressive heat

The summer sun  
beats  
down on me  
my head the surface  
on which the unforgiving  
rays of solar energy  
belt out their  
summertime riff

as lazy black and yellow  
bees  
keep the time  
that neverending beat  
bop bopping around  
the listless drooping flower  
that is me

Summertime blues  
my July August identity  
head still bent  
in defeat

Oh please  
I beg that yellow orb  
so circular and infinite  
cease, cease grant me  
Peace

-ii-

My Autumn self  
lazes, gazes  
contentedly  
stretching limbs and breathing deep  
the crispness in the air

a timpani  
resounding for all  
to hear  
rat-a-tat

Fall air is wisdom, knowledge  
books cracked open, pens gliding  
smoothly  
over linen white paper  
scritch-scratch  
telling stories, rhymes and myth  
of summertimes past  
that no longer exist

For Autumn is here  
her glory unfolding  
oranges yellows fiery reds  
my head  
held high to see and breathe  
and feel at long last  
a sensation  
that is truly  
Peace

# 待つ (歩き続けること)

みやむら おうむ

赤くなった太陽が西の空からビルを揺らしていた  
道路は熔けて  
その上に焼き付いていた記憶も  
蒸発していた

それから陽は落ちたが  
ぼくは歩き続けていた  
ぼくだけのものと思っていた人の許へ  
或いは蒸発しなかった唯ひとつの記憶の下へ

あの夜 気を狂わせる寸前のまま待ち続け  
それより外 何も出来ないまま待ち続け  
静かに待つこともできず 歩き続けた

木立は揺れていたかも知れない  
月は気高く掛かっていたかも知れない  
川もいつものように流れ続けていただろう

けれど 突き落とされそうな  
丘の上から見下ろした暗闇には  
ヘッドライトが鬼火のように  
迷い乱れていた

ベトベトとまとわり付く汗を拭くすべもなく  
あの交差点まで  
次の電柱まで  
仕舞いには何の目標もないまま  
勝手に脚だけが動いていたが  
それでも  
回送電車の運転台や  
闇に光るラーメン屋の窓が  
通り過ぎて行き

じっとしている苦しみだけは避けることができたのだ

時計も消え 月も消え 星も消え  
何も考えられず 何も浮かばなくなつたその時  
向こう側に  
灯台のような駅が 大きな光を放ちながら  
現れた

ほどなく 東山の木立を抜けて  
洗い尽くすように 淡い朝日も差してくる  
涼しげな朝は 待つ苦しみを一瞬消し去った  
けれど 昇り始めた太陽は  
今日もまた  
来るべき午後の煉獄を予感させていたのだ

## To Wait (Endless Walk)

*Ohm Miyamura*

Buildings swayed under the reddened western sun  
Roads melted and  
Even the memories baked upon them  
Evaporated

Then, the sun set but  
I was still walking  
To the person who I thought I owned to myself  
Or, to the only memory which had not evaporated

That night, I walked with a mind on the verge of madness  
Waiting was all that I could do  
Yet, I could not wait without keeping on my walk

Trees might have been swaying  
The moon may have hung in a solemn hue of blue  
Rivers perhaps ran as usual

Looking down into the dark from the hill side  
Where I almost fell  
Head lights were floating  
Like as many spirits

Not knowing what to do with the sticking sweat  
Thinking of the distance only to the next intersection

Or to the next telephone pole  
Eventually without an object in mind  
Legs alone were moving forwards  
Yet  
The driver's seats of deadhead trains  
The glowing windows of the noodle shops  
Had all gone past

And that helped me bear the agony of waiting

Clock, the moon, the stars all disappeared  
The moment my thoughts came to a halt and when nothing was there in my mind  
Over there  
As if it were a lighthouse  
The station with a huge neon sign came into sight

Soon, through trees of the eastern mountains  
Comes the sun rinsing the whole scene

Coolish morning erased the pain of waiting for a while  
But the rising sun  
Of this day too  
Makes me feel the forthcoming purgatory of afternoon

## **Haiku**

*Joe Kashi*

### **Alaska Summer**

Heat? What summer heat?  
10 Celsius? Maybe 20?  
Still, it beats winter.

### **Autumn Sun**

Stained glass windows  
Low Autumn sun. Morning frost.  
Early snow still melts.

### **Early Winter**

Dark clouds, Autumn trees  
Fading now, bare to the sky.  
Cranes have left. Winter!

### **Awaiting Spring**

Now mist lies heavy  
As the still land awaits snow  
I too await Spring

# Sleep Eludes Me

*Brian Cullen*

## Writer's Notes

The humid summer heat in Japan brings two of my worst fears: insomnia and centipedes. On many nights, I have awoken every few minutes thinking that centipedes were crawling over me about to bite me with their nasty poisonous fangs. On a morning following such a night, I awoke to find that my bicycle had been completely repaired by some stranger during the night. This poem was an attempt to make sense of these events and to attempt to conquer my fear of centipedes. It was partly successful. I have since learned that the proper way to kill a centipede is to snip it neatly in two with a long scissors.

Sleep eludes me, I arise  
To where a strange sight meets my eyes  
My bicycle with twisted pedal  
Central spike without a saddle  
Stands now with perfect form

Who had come to fix my bike?  
Their secret deeds are so much like  
A story by those brothers Grimm  
And there's one thing I can say of them  
They're nicer than the rogue called Aesop

Aesop? Oh yes, you'll remember that he said ...

There was a son who came to grief  
For he became a rotten thief  
At the gallows, he called "mother dear"  
Then he bit off the old girl's dear  
Yes, Aesop was a strange one

Very strange ... nice story for the children ...

That set my thoughts to swim  
And you could say that of him  
He couldn't be a Disney writer  
And his stories don't get any lighter  
When you grow up and find them once again

But let's forget those earless mothers  
And get back to the German brothers  
Fascinating in themselves  
But more so when they wrote of elves  
And the old shoemaker

Perhaps it was the elves who came  
And fixed my bike up as a game  
And cheered me up when I'd awoken

From a sleep so truly broken  
By dark nightmare

Yes, my centipede illusion  
Came again as night intrusion  
When I should be deep in sleep  
Out of darkness, they do creep  
Out of world and mind

They wake me often in the night  
Send me searching for their bite  
Making me sit up bolt straight  
Four, five, six, seven, eight  
Times or more

Go forth and multiply, said God  
And they did, one by one, they trod  
Out where each one breeds  
Till the whole world is full of centipedes  
And the people, they did cry

... when they saw these fearsome things emerging from the weeds  
... for these were not your ordinary garden centipedes

No, they were a foot or more in length  
And even when they're rent  
In two or three or five  
Each part is still alive  
Moving on

Wriggling blindly  
Don't let them find me  
What generates such disgust  
About these creatures in the dust  
As I cower in the corner with my spray

A horror script by Stephen King  
With characters like these would bring  
Rejection slips, "It's unconvincing",  
But they don't know what sets us wincing  
Deep in the night when all is real

And when they bite  
It's only right  
That I should smite them down  
Oh God, I love that word, smite,  
Oh yes, I am God  
As I spare not the rod  
And yet spoil the beasts

Now where are the elves, I wonder  
As centipedes come asunder  
Underneath my withering attack  
Will the elves ever come back  
To help me out again

No, alone I fight and thrash the air  
Against a foe, is it really there  
Taking all this life like God  
And then I see they are not shod  
Not a shoe between them all

Where are your little shoes, I say  
To a centipede that I would slay  
But his speech was quite impeded  
That happens when you're centipeded  
Yet he breaks out in song

[In Song]  
Heigh ho, heigh ho, heigh hoo,  
I haven't got a single shoe  
I bite, I eat  
I have a million feet  
But I haven't got a single shoe  
Oh what can I do  
I haven't got a single shoe

Oh dear I said, that's no use  
Why don't we call a little truce  
And think a while on what to do  
For who is happy with no shoe?  
Then I recalled ...

Did I mention I am God divine  
Just for the few short minutes of this rhyme  
So I can do most anything  
And I'm most impressed that you can sing  
Though you're a little out of tune

I'm too tired to do the job myself  
So I guess I'll whistle for an elf  
He can dolly up some pairs of shoes  
End your centipedal blues  
And we can have some peace

Me being Irish, I've never seen an elf  
From beyond the continental shelf  
Down in Germany or maybe Spain  
But I gave a whistle all the same

And then I see

Not the elves, but the fairies come  
Wearing tight black leather on their bum  
Two by two, married leprauchauns  
A host of Marys who were once called Seans  
Well, I as God don't mind, and why should you?

The fairies start to make the shoes  
And centipedes come round to choose  
Then they walk off in the distance  
Agreed on happy co-existence  
We say goodbye

And so...

I give up the role of God  
Laugh at myself with wink and nod  
No more nonsense for my head  
I turn out the light and go to bed  
Where I sleep

# **Our Heat... Rubbing The Paradise**

*Cristy ???*

Beginning of the end.

My eyes in your eyes, the same freedom, the same will.

Words and silences, the owners of our spaces,

Making memories of ourselves.

My fingers in your hand, awakening slowly

When they go across your body,

Your hips draped with my naked thigh,

Your tongue gets on a path that we both know

Doesn't have return.

A mix of sweats, a unique essence,

Chiseling feelings and emotions.

My sex embraces your sex and we both begin the dance,

From slow to fast and slow again.

We blow away, your hands hold me up,

My hands caress you all.

Suddenly, your breath reaches my soul,

Delicious contractions, which seem never ending,

The paradise is touched, the paradise is us.

Silently get off, our fingers still entwined,

A soft kiss caressing our thoughts,

A last gaze before to leave...but...

We are still there, our paradise is still there.

## Talkin' Settee

*(to be sung while clapping hands)*  
by Tom Bauerle



On a wall in the fort at Johdpur, India is a plaque bearing the golden imprint of thirty-two hands. These were the hands of the wives of the Maharajah of Johdpur who, in the days before the British Raj suddenly sickened and died. At that time, the wealthy Hindus practiced a tradition called settee in which a widow was obligated to sit in the funeral pyre of her newly dead husband and burn herself alive along with the body of her spouse. All thirty-two of the Maharajah's wives, some of them still young children, dutifully performed this act of self-immolation. But before they did, they left their handprints like golden graffiti on the wall to say, "Remember me, once I was here." I wrote this poem imagining what the peasant farmers might

have been thinking as they watched their rich overlords enact this strange custom.

When the British government outlawed this practice, the Hindu women rioted in the street, condemning the foreign government for meddling with their traditions. Besides, they argued, there was no place in Indian society for a widow. Better to burn quickly than to starve to death. The British troops had to call out the military to put down the riots and force the women to stop burning themselves alive.

Thirty-two hands  
on the fortress wall  
first wife, second wives  
child brides, all  
in the Maharajah's harem  
at the Maharajah's call  
at Johdpur palace  
behind the Maharajah's walls  
And their children would be  
kings and princes and queens  
and palace intriguers  
and libertines  
but the Maharaja sickened  
and the Maharaja died  
and duty and honor  
can't be denied  
and they all jumped in

when the Maharajah fried  
and they all jumped in  
when the Maharajah fried

Thirty-two hands shout  
“Remember me”  
and the peacocks in the garden  
‘neath the Tamarind tree  
and the feasts in the palace  
and silk saris on the skin  
and the riches and the power  
and the orgies and the sin  
and when the Maharajah burned  
we all jumped in  
when the Maharajah burned  
we all jumped in”

At the funeral by the pyre  
by the river at dawn  
the same thoughts came  
to every one:  
“If I had it to do  
all over again  
would I choose a poor honest farmer  
and work without end?  
watch my children go hungry  
scratch the dirt and slave?  
Or is it better to be  
pampered and petted and kept?”  
and each one wondered  
and each one wept  
and the choices they made  
brought them to this end  
and when the Maharajah burned  
they all stepped in  
when the Maharajah burned  
they all stepped in.

Thirty-two hands shout  
“Remember me”  
and the peacocks in the garden  
‘neath the Tamarind tree  
and the feasts in the palace  
and silk saris on the skin  
and the riches and the power  
and the orgies and the sin,  
and when the Maharajah burned  
we all jumped in

when the Maharajah burned  
we all jumped in”

And love and duty  
and money and desire  
they can put you in the garden  
they can set you in the fire  
and thirty-two wives  
went up in smoke  
while the Maharajah’s ashes  
made the farmers choke  
as they stood by the river  
with their children at their feet  
while their wives brewed tea  
that tasted sweet  
and they munched on rice  
and they dined on gruel  
but they kept their feet out of the fire  
they were nobody’s fools  
and though they were scorned  
for the things they lacked  
when the Maharajah burned  
they all stepped back  
when the Maharajah burned  
they all stepped back